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DOCUMENTS

General M. C. Meigs on the Conduct of the Civil War

WHEN President Lincoln was inaugurated, Montgomery C. Meigs (1816-1892), who had been graduated from West Point in 1836, was a captain in the corps of engineers in the United States army. For several years he had been occupied with the construction of public works in and near Washington—chiefly the Potomac aqueduct and the enlargement of the Capitol. On May 14, 1861, he was commissioned as a colonel. On May 15 he was commissioned as a brigadier-general and appointed quartermaster-general of the army, which position he occupied throughout the Civil War and until his retirement from the army in 1882. In 1887 or 1888 he was invited by the editor of the *Century's* war book, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, to write an account of the relations of Lincoln and Seward to the military commanders, the argument being that Meigs was in a position to make an authoritative reply to the charges made on that subject by General McClellan in the posthumous book, *McClellan's Own Story*, then recently published. The general "was not a literary person and had no taste for writing except of official reports of work done", but he wrote the article and sent it in (1888). It was never printed. Col. J. R. M. Taylor, U. S. A., a grandson of its author, has kindly placed a copy of it at the disposal of this journal. The original is in the possession of the general's younger brother, S. Emlen Meigs, of Philadelphia.

Though the *Century* editor doubtless had his reasons for not printing the contribution, which in truth lacks form, it has in 1920 a distinct value for the student of civil war history, as presenting the opinions of a capable observer whose position had given him special opportunities for knowledge. General Meigs also contributes interesting testimony as to several particular transactions. The two episodes having most interest, of those which he mentions, are, first, the expedition which he and Secretary Seward, in the anxious closing days of March, 1861, devised for the reinforcement of Fort Pickens, Pensacola, and, secondly, the councils held at the White House in January, 1862, in the endeavor to obtain some action from McClellan.

It so happened that, soon after this manuscript was presented to

the *Review*, descendants of General Meigs gave to the Library of Congress a large number of volumes of diaries and other records from his hand, and it was natural to seek in them for further light, from his point of view, on the two transactions named. What was found is presented as sections II. and III. of the ensuing documents. The material respecting the Fort Pickens episode appears in shorthand in a thick quarto volume containing journal-matter, newspaper clippings, and photographs, of 1860 and 1861. Most of the shorthand matter relating to the origin of that expedition has already been transliterated, and used by Nicolay and Hay in their life of Lincoln, in which (III. 430-441, IV. 1-7) is the best account of the affair. The secretary of the Department of Historical Research in the Carnegie Institution of Washington has kindly revised the transliteration and completed it to the end of Meigs's stay at Fort Pickens, but only the earlier part is used here.

The planning and execution of the Fort Pickens expedition still remain an astonishing transaction—an expedition planned and carried out by the President and the Secretary of State (amateur strategists in March, 1861, if ever there were such), with the aid of a captain of engineers and a lieutenant in the navy, all in such secrecy that neither the Secretary of War nor the Secretary of the Navy knew anything of the preparations, and important plans of the latter, which had received the President's approval, were wrecked by conflicting secret orders of the President himself! We already have accounts of the affair by two of the chief participants, one by Gen. Erasmus D. Keyes, in his *Fifty Years' Observation of Men and Events*, pp. 379-393, and a jaunty one by Admiral Porter in his *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War*, pp. 13-25. Crawford's account, in his *Genesis of the Civil War*, pp. 407-416, is based on information supplied by both Porter and Meigs and on Navy Department papers obtained by him in Secretary Robeson's time, and since published in the *Official Records, Navies*. The view which Welles not unnaturally took of the matter is set forth in his *Lincoln and Seward* (*Galaxy* articles), pp. 55-62. He gives further information in a narrative written some years after the events, prefixed to his *Diary* (I. 16-26, 38-39). The account in Soley's *Admiral Porter*, pp. 100-114, has advantages from the special knowledge of an assistant secretary of the navy. His predecessor Fox tells what he knew in letters written shortly after and recently published, *Confidential Correspondence*, I. 31-35, 40-45, and in a later narrative printed in *Contributions of the Old Residents' Historical Association, Lowell, Mass.*, II. 52-54. Moreover, Meigs himself gave a

guarded account of the matter in the *National Intelligencer* of September 16, 1865, called out by a *Tribune* editorial of September 12. But it is an advantage to have in full the contemporary private record of a principal participant in this extraordinary transaction.

On the momentous councils of January 10-13, 1862, respecting and with McClellan, we already have the statements of three of the principal participants. The fullest and most authoritative is that of McDowell, confirmed by Lincoln, in Raymond, *Life of Lincoln*, appendix, pp. 772-777. McClellan's account is in *McClellan's Own Story*, pp. 156-159. Secretary Chase's diary for January 12 is printed in Maunsell B. Field, *Memories of Many Men and of Some Women* (London, 1874), pp. 267-269. Meigs's account in the manuscript intended for the *Century* (I., *post*, pp. 292-293) adds a number of particulars and is much fuller than the entries (III., *post*) drawn from a little pocket diary for 1862; but the latter have seemed to be worth preserving.

I. THE RELATIONS OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN AND SECRETARY STANTON TO THE MILITARY COMMANDERS IN THE CIVIL WAR.

When the actual war began in the firing on Fort Sumter, probably the only expeditions determined on were those to reinforce Fort Pickins and to supply Fort Sumter.

The first originated with Mr. Seward and the President himself.¹ It was kept secret, its object and its composition communicated to the smallest number of persons consistent with its due preparation and dispatch; no member even of the Cabinet, except the Secretary of State, was made acquainted with the intention to send off such an expedition. Captain Meigs of the Corps of Engineers, and Lieut. Col. Keyes, Military Secretary to Gen'l Scott, were ordered by the President to prepare a scheme for this movement, to submit it with an unwritten message from Mr. Lincoln to Gen. Scott; and, after his approval, they were charged with the preparation of the necessary orders to be signed by the President.

Lieut. David Porter, U.S.N., at a later, but early period, was associated with them in preparing the instructions for the co-operation of a naval vessel to the command of which he was assigned by executive order signed by the President, but not made known to the Navy Department.

This careful secrecy was successful in so far that the destination of the Expedition remained unknown to friend or foe until the steamer *Atlantic* appeared off Fort Pickins.

The Sumter Expedition originated, I believe, in the mind of Gustavus Fox, an ex-officer of the Navy engaged in Civil pursuits, very highly esteemed by his former comrades, and, later, Assistant Secretary of the Navy to the end of the War.

I never knew, directly, with whom the other and later Coast expedi-

¹ See section II., *post*.

tions originated, but it is to be presumed that, in their long preparation, most officers of high position concerned in their dispatch and preparation, were more or less consulted or heard. General McClellan, no doubt, had his say in regard to them. They were the result of many men's thoughts,—they began in the attempt to organize a coast force for operations in the bays of Virginia and Maryland.

The propriety, as soon as the national forces grew strong enough, of shutting up the ports through which the adventurers of Europe hastened to introduce military supplies to the South was evident to all, and these expeditions followed the creation of a military power.

The President's approval and sanction was necessary to the raising of troops for them; to the engagement of transports; to the appointment by State Governors of the officers of the Volunteer regiments; and no secrecy was possible except perhaps as to the exact date of sailing and the exact period of landing.

Undoubtedly the Cabinet fully discussed all points of importance, and General McClellan must have been in the executive councils of the time. It is to be supposed that he had the military orders or instructions drawn up for final approval of the Executive,—the Commander-in-Chief.

Neither the President nor the Secretary of War had then the military experience,—probably neither of them knew the official routine or manner of framing and recording military orders and instructions at that early day of their official experience. Such matters would naturally be intrusted to the Commanding General.

Mr. Lincoln, as an officer of volunteers, had commanded a company of infantry in a short campaign during the Black-Hawk War. This could not have given him much military knowledge, but even that must have proved useful to him in the end.

General Scott, the senior and Commanding General of the Army, was in Washington at the inauguration of President Lincoln. He collected there a few troops to protect that inauguration. His military capacity had been proven on many fields and he had conducted great and successful campaigns in Mexico. He was held by the people of the United States to be the highest American authority on all military questions. Undoubtedly his advice was sought, obtained and relied upon by the President, Cabinet and advisors.

The circumstances, political and geographical, forced certain preliminary operations on the Government. We had seen how the importance of holding two forts on the Southern Coast induced earliest action by Mr. Lincoln, who dispatched military and naval expeditions in less than a month after his inauguration. The enemy collected forces in front of the Capital, and their sentries walked post at the Virginia ends of the three bridges which cross the Potomac. Their hostile sentries were daily in sight of the citizens of the Capital and of the legislators who remained true to their duties.

The loyal citizens of the southern border states,—Western Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri, demanded protection. This compelled the gathering of troops along the Ohio, and at the confluence of that river with the Mississippi.

St. Louis, torn by hostile parties, called for troops to protect the loyal, and to prevent the resources of that rich and powerful city being seized by the disaffected of the city and state. Ohio hastened to the

assistance of the loyal of West Virginia; and, as early as April 31st 1861,² the Governor appointed McClellan Major General of Volunteers. On the 14th of May the President commissioned him Major General U. S. Army, with orders to disperse the rebel forces then over-running West Virginia.

General Scott gathered a strong force at Washington and in the Shenandoah Valley; and, early in July,³ a council was called in the East Room of the Executive Mansion at which were gathered the Members of the Government and the principle officers of the forces at hand. At this council General Scott opened the proceedings by stating that "Our forces had at length become considerable, and were now strong enough to justify some expeditions."

The composition of a corps to attempt to drive the enemy from his position at Manassas was then discussed; its proper proportion of infantry, cavalry and artillery settled. After some remarks by the General, apparently drawn out by the evident hesitation of officers so much his juniors in years and service, to utter opinions in the presence of one whom all looked up to as the great master of the art of war, he said he "desired their advice; that he felt the burden of many years, and it was not right to leave upon him, at his age, the whole weight of such a responsibility,—that younger men must soon take it up".

In the end, the question was freely considered,—the important details of the force settled; the action of Patterson's army near Winchester discussed, and General Scott distinctly assumed the responsibility of giving such instructions to Patterson as would occupy Johnson's⁴ troops, and prevent their coming to the battlefield in time to interfere with McDowell who was to command the advance on Manassas. He said,—“I assume the responsibility for having Johnson kept off McDowell's flank.”

I think that so far as campaign plans go, this first campaign originated in Generals Scott and McDowell. Some such movement everybody looked for,—they prepared and executed it.

With new troops not in training for marching, the movement was slower than anticipated and Johnson escaped from Patterson who occupied his attention as he believed, during the time prescribed to him, and then fell back. The result was that Johnson fell fresh on McDowell's tired and exhausted troops and turned their victory, in the moment of triumph, into a severe defeat.

I understood that General Scott's general plan was to send a strong column down the Mississippi, with which the people of the Northwest,—even then powerful and growing rapidly, though none foresaw then the immense and wonderful increase in population, in production and in wealth, which we have lived to see in the twenty-seven years which have passed since the McDowell Campaign was ordered,—should break the barrier audaciously and impudently drawn across the Nation's path to the Sea.

This column was spoken of in Press and conversation as "Scott's Anaconda", which should crush the rebellion in its coils.

The expulsion of the enemy from West Virginia, as has been already

² Apr. 23. *McClellan's Own Story*, p. 41.

³ June 29. Nicolay and Hay, *Lincoln*, IV. 322. Cf. McDowell's testimony as to this council, *Report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War*, II. 35-37.

⁴ Johnston's.

said, fell to General McClellan with whom served General Rosscrans.⁵ Both had been Engineer officers of high character. McClellan had gone through the Mexican War with Scott's column, but, while he acquired great reputation, he had command only of a company of Engineers with which he did good service in the siege of Vera Cruz, and in the battles attending the successful march to the City of Mexico. His further military experience was limited to a visit to the trenches at Sabastopol besieged by the French and British armies, and their auxiliaries. This was military experience, but in inferior command, and not such as developed great and successful generals; but the American of that generation surviving with age not too great, had no other; and on McDowell's defeat McClellan was, at the instance of Scott, fresh from his successes in West Virginia called to the command of all the Armies of the United States; Scott retiring in favor of the younger man.

I have always believed that Scott impressed upon the war its first general direction and scheme of operations; but the air was full of military opinions and plans of campaigns. The Press gave voice to their authors. Everybody's attention was turned to military affairs, and upon the retirement of General Scott, burdened with years, and infirmities which made it impossible for him to take the field, there were left no officers of the War of 1812, and few of the veterans of the Mexican War whose history recorded such services as to give much authority to their opinions. The nature of the country indicated the general lines of operations defensive and offensive, on both sides of the contest.

Troops collected at Charleston attracted the patriot naval and military forces to Port Royal and to Charleston Harbor. Savannah's Fort Pulaski was besieged and fell in due course. The troops of the Northwest collected at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi, and there fell under the command of General Grant, whose active military experience had been acquired in command of a company in Mexico; not greater, therefore, than that of McClellan before described.

To command the Mississippi column, Halleck, also a former officer of Engineers, was made Major General and stationed at St. Louis. Grant at Cairo soon showed ability and initiative. He seized Paducah, an enterprise which had important results both military and political. He attacked Belmont with raw troops in inferior force; and, inflicting much damage on the enemy, withdrew successfully with prisoners and captured guns, and taught the Southwest not to rely upon the belief that one Southerner was the equal of five Yankees. He took Fort Henry after urgent request to Halleck to allow him to attempt it, and he took Fort Donaldson⁶ without permission, and captured 15,000 prisoners, and all this he did by the 16th of February 1862; when McClellan's first known plan of campaign for the Army of the Potomac was only two weeks old.

In these events is seen the gradual hardening into form of a plan of campaign extending over the whole country; its general features suggested themselves, doubtless, to many intelligent minds in civil as in military life, whose tastes inclined to such studies and speculations.

Schalk wrote in 1861, and printed in 1862, a summary of the Art of War in which a chapter on the war in America anticipated with great

⁵ Rosecrans.

⁶ Donelson.

success the operations of the armies, not in particular and exact detail, but in general terms such as justified his later work on the campaigns of 1862 and 1863.⁷

I do not believe therefore that any man has a just right to claim to be the author of all the plans of campaign finally executed,—neither Mr. Lincoln, nor Stanton, nor McClellan.

The initiation is due to Scott. He soon learned that he could not sit in a chair in Washington and personally command an army engaged in battle thirty miles distant, with safety to that army or to his own great and well won reputation; and soon after the Battle of Bull Run he voluntarily retired from public life, and left to McClellan, whom, upon his success in West Virginia, he had invited to Washington, the further conduct of the war.

General McClellan showed great ability in the organization and drilling of the Army of the Potomac. He fancied that in every night's telegraphic conversation with Halleck and other commanders he really devised and governed their movements; he grew to believe that he had great military capacity; he said one day, there were very few men who could command and manoeuvre 100,000 men but that he believed he could do this.

For want of better, the President yielded his own judgment, and allowed the line of the Chickahominy to become the line of operations of the Army of the Potomac. His letters, heretofore published, show that he did not approve it, and only consented to allow it.

The General was an Engineer, and sat down to another siege of Vera Cruz or of Sabastopol before Yorktown. He called upon the Navy to do his work for him. It seemed to become a habit with him to call upon others to undertake the hard end of the military campaigns. He wished the squadron of wooden ships to do what Sabastopol gave every reason to believe was impossible,—what he then learned, able, and aged chief of his old corps of Engineers, General Totten, had, in official public reports on the relations of ships and forts, repeatedly pronounced impossible; what the most powerful British squadron at Sabastopol had tried in vain. This call was not obeyed, and the Army was left to its own efforts.

The country was impatient. The President felt the pressure, and finally against his protest, he sent Burnside to relieve McClellan; but at Burnside's earnest plea, left with him discretion, after acquainting McClellan with the contents of the order in his pocket, not to deliver it, if any assurance of progress could, under this pressure, be obtained from him.

Burnside obtained such assurances as he thought justified him in not taking command of the Army on the Peninsula, and returned to the President and reported, leaving McClellan in command.

McClellan showed capacity to move an army of 100,000 men in the ordinary operations of a campaign, but not to guide them to victory except at Antietam, and that was a victory from which the beaten army escaped with the loss only of what it suffered on the battlefield. It was not such a victory as Napoleon had accustomed the world to demand

⁷ Emil Schalk, *Summary of the Art of War, written expressly for and dedicated to the U. S. Volunteer Army* (Philadelphia, 1862); *id. Campaigns of 1862 and 1863, illustrating the Principles of Strategy* (Philadelphia, 1863).

from its Generals, but it was an important one, and it put an end to the invasion of Pennsylvania, though it left the hostile army in condition to renew that invasion on the next opportunity.

McClellan seemed to have no sufficient appreciation of the fact that an American soldier costs his country \$1,000 a year, whether merely drilling, or engaged with the enemy. He seemed satisfied, with 200,000 men in his army, to rest quiet and drill and review them; to ride the picket line occasionally; but, when urged to move his troops to accomplish something, it was always some distant corps whose movements he suggested.

He seemed to show the disposition of which Marshall Marmont accuses most generals: "They", he says, "prepare for battle with intelligence and skill; but then hesitation commences." "A battle is such a chance medley, success depends on so many chances, that the General doubts and hesitates till the favorable moment is lost before he makes up his mind to give the word."

On Friday, January 10th, 1862, the President, in great distress, entered my office.⁸ He took a chair in front of the open fire and said, "General, what shall I do? The people are impatient; Chase has no money and he tells me he can raise no more; the General of the Army has typhoid fever. The bottom is out of the tub. What shall I do?"

I said, "If General McClellan has typhoid fever, that is an affair of six weeks at least; he will not be able sooner to command. In the meantime, if the enemy in our front is as strong as he believes, they may attack on any day, and I think you should see some of those upon whom in such case, or in case any forward movement becomes necessary, the control must fall. Send for them to meet you soon and consult with them; perhaps you may select the responsible commander for such an event."

The council was called.⁹ On Sunday, January 12th, McDowell and Franklin called on me with a summons to the White House for one P.M. These officers, and Messrs. Seward, Chase and Blair of the Cabinet attended. The President announced that he had called this meeting in consequence of the sickness of General McClellan, but he had that morning heard from him that he was better, and would be able to be present the next day; and that, on this promise, he adjourned the discussion for twenty four hours.

The next day, Jan. 13th, the same persons and General McClellan appeared at the rendezvous. The President opened the proceedings by making a statement of the cause of his calling the Council. Mr. Chase, and Mr. Blair, if memory is accurate, both spoke. All looked to McClellan, who sat still with his head hanging down, and mute. The situation grew awkward. The President spoke again a few words. One of the Generals said something; McClellan said something which evidently did not please the speaker, and again was mute.

I moved my chair to the side of McClellan's and urged him, saying, "The President evidently expects you to speak; can you not promise

⁸ The office of the quartermaster-general, moved that day to the Winder Building, still standing, at the corner of Seventeenth and F Streets in Washington. See the diary of this date, *post*, III.

⁹ There was such a meeting on Jan. 10, at which Meigs was not present. McDowell's statement in appendix to Raymond's *Lincoln*, pp. 772-774.

some movement towards Manassas? You are strong." He replied, "I cannot move on them with as great a force as they have." "Why, you have near 200,000 men, how many have they?" "Not less than 175,000 according to my advices." I said, "Do you think so?" and "the President expects something from you." He replied, "If I tell him my plans they will be in the New York Herald tomorrow morning. He can't keep a secret, he will tell them to Tadd." I said: "That is a pity, but he is the President,—the Commander-in-Chief; he has a right to know; it is not respectful to sit mute when he so clearly requires you to speak. He is superior to all."

After some further urging, McClellan moved, and seemed to prepare to speak. He declined to give his plans in detail, but thought it best to press the movement of Buell's troops in the central line of operation. After a few words that brought out nothing more, Mr. Lincoln said, "Well, on this assurance of the General that he will press the advance in Kentucky, I will be satisfied, and will adjourn this Council."

I did not discuss the affair with others, but it left on me the impression that McClellan would prefer to send forward any other troops than those under his present command. After the evacuation of Yorktown, he sent his army in pursuit, and remained at Yorktown to embark Franklin's corps.

Though the immediate results of this council was so meagre and unsatisfactory, it perhaps had a useful effect, for, on Feby. 3d, 1862, about two weeks later, McClellan wrote a letter proposing a plan of campaign for the active portion of the Army of the Potomac, which he wished to land at Urbana on the lower Rappahanock, and march in one day to West Point, where, crossing the Fork, he expected to reach Richmond in two marches and apparently to surprise that City and capture it before the Army at Manassas could interpose. But, though at this Council Mr. Lincoln yielded in despair to his wilful General, he, in "McClellan's Last Words",¹⁰ gives an account of the meeting with the assertion that it grew out of some intrigue of officers desirous of replacing him in the enjoyment of the honors of command.

It originated in his own typhoid fever and the President's distress at the lamentable condition in which that put all the affairs of defence and finance. The President may have consulted others than myself, but, if so, I never knew it. This history has given it exact.

Thus grew up the details of campaign operations. Four important letters have been made public. In the written and earnest declarations of their authors, Lincoln and Stanton, are positive proof that both the President and his great War Minister dealt faithfully, honorably, and patriotically with their subordinates.

The first is a letter of May 9th '62, dated at Fortress Monroe (See Appendix folio A) to General McClellan,¹¹ in which, with patience, with kindness, and with sincerity, he deals with objections to the establishing of Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac, then over 150,000 strong. He also gives him some good advice showing a knowledge of human nature in which the General seemed to be deficient.

The reference to the reports of threats of a dictatorship in the letter to Hooker (see Appendix, folio B)¹² are illustrated by a scene at Har-

¹⁰ Meaning, *McClellan's Own Story*; see pp. 157-158.

¹¹ Lincoln, *Works*, ed. Nicolay and Hay, II. 149.

¹² Lincoln to Hooker, Jan. 26, 1863. *Ibid.*, II. 306.

rierson's Landing. I sat by a camp-fire near the tent in which Halleck consulted with McClellan, and a circle of officers of rank gathered around the fire in the twilight. Mutterings of a march on Washington to "clear out those fellows" were uttered, when Burnside moved into the circle opposite me and said aloud: "I don't know what you fellows call this talk, but I call it flat Treason, By God!"

"Come fellows, let's go," some one said, and the circle melted away without another word.

I spoke to Halleck of it as important as indicating a bad spirit in the Army, but he made light of it as only Camp-talk, which meant nothing. Probably this occurred also in other camps, and evidently it reached Mr. Lincoln's ears. The letter to Hooker accompanied a commission to command the Army of the Potomac after Burnside's defeat at Fredericksburg.

The third is Mr. Lincoln's letter to General Grant (see Appendix, folio C)¹³ on taking command of the whole of the army before entering on the Wilderness Campaign.

The fourth is the letter of Mr. Stanton to the Rev. Mr. Dyer (see Appendix, folio D)¹⁴ not made public till after the death of the writer, who preferred to suffer the obloquy cast upon him by McClellan's friends and partisans, to risking the least injury to the cause to which he as truly gave his life as did any soldier, who died in battle.

These are true letters, written from the heart. They express the true and honest feelings and policy of their authors and will, wherever read with impartial mind, satisfy the reader that no just accusation of treachery or bad faith can lie against their authors. My constant intercourse with both never left me a doubt or suspicion as to their intentions or their loyalty, to those intrusted by them with command. They asked for action, for progress, for victory; they sometimes were urgent, when patience failed under costly inaction,—when it became difficult to raise men and money, and to procure the supplies loudly demanded by those who failed to make effective use of them, but who well knew that without such costly and continuous supplies, the Armies they commanded must speedily dissolve and disperse. Commanders in such cases, were sometimes displaced, but never capriciously or without absolute necessity. Amongst other obvious reasons such changes were limited by the difficulty of finding better qualified successors. There were many brave officers available,—none with experience in war proving their ability to command such large bodies of troops. These had to be painfully sifted out from the mass of men of all ranks coming forward to serve their country.

Mr. Lincoln's letter to Hooker is a monument of patriotic self-abnegation, and that to Grant, perhaps too much sacrificing the just right and authority, and even the duty, of the Head of the Nation to have knowledge, and influence, in the course of the application and use of the enormous supplies of men and money entrusted by the Constitution and laws and by the devotion of the people, to the Commander-in-Chief. He could never free himself from his great responsibility.

These things and their direction were entrusted by the Nation to the Executive Head, and not to any of the Generals who were his creatures,

¹³ Lincoln to Grant, Apr. 30, 1864. *Works*, II. 517.

¹⁴ Stanton to Rev. Heman Dyer, May 18, 1862. Gorham, *Stanton*, I. 426-432.

made and unmade by his breath, and for whose capacity and conduct he bore the whole responsibility. They sometimes, in the intoxication of suddenly attained power, forgot their dependence upon the Executive. He was refused admittance to the bedside of one General when he knocked at the door, tormented with the cares and anxieties of his position. He, it was believed, was spoken of, as unable to keep the important secrets held in the breast of his creatures and their subordinate creations. A spectacle to make gods and men ashamed!

Had there been comrades or rivals of McClellan equally esteemed by the people, he had been earlier replaced. But his early and successful campaign in West Virginia had given him prestige and had borne him into command of the defeated Army of the Potomac, and later, of the whole Army of the People.

Why Mr. Lincoln endeavored to force McClellan to cross the Potomac after the Army had driven Lee across and into Virginia, and why he at the last sent Burnside to relieve him at Warrenton, perhaps no one fully knows. Letters of Mr. Lincoln on this movement, which appear to show that he had at that time pretty clear ideas of military principles, are in print. They urge greater rapidity of movement.

At length patience seems to have been exhausted and Burnside replaced him, and moved quietly to Fredericksburg. In due time he delivered his attack and failed. He behaved honorably about it, and stood ready to obey orders without murmuring or to give up the command, as might be thought best.

He was followed by Hooker, who with wonderful skill, reorganized a defeated and discouraged army, and infused into it a new and hopeful spirit; but who, after planning and conducting to apparent certain success, in the very hour of greatest hope and triumph, broke down disastrously and was the cause of dreadful defeat and loss. Lee moved round his right flank and he followed vigorously. Some differences arose during the march about the disposition of the garrison at Harpers Ferry and he asked to be relieved, if not permitted to carry out his wishes and views. The President took him at his word, and in the very crisis of a great movement, placed Meade in command. He had shown daring and initiative in the disastrous battle of Fredericksburg, where his division penetrated the hostile line of battle and, failing of expected support, was successfully and skillfully withdrawn. It was known that Hooker's habits before he reached such high command had been bad; his breakdown at Chancellorsville was ascribed by many to a relapse; by others to the shock of a ball which struck a post near him. It has never been settled what was the true cause, though he himself is alleged by an old friend to have, when questioned, replied that he was not drunk, but at the moment he had "lost confidence in Hooker."

Whatever the cause, no one can blame the President for accepting in such an extreme crisis, the opportunity afforded by the demand for relief from command of one who had shown that he could not be relied upon in a supreme moment to exercise in the highest degree the military talent he undoubtedly possessed when entirely in command of his faculties. The risk was too great, and the result of the battle impending, justified the choice of General Meade, who won a brilliant victory.

He was blamed for not risking more by following and attacking the defeated army. It is not here in order to discuss this question. No

great pursuit has followed any battle of this war. The country does not afford the paved roads and open fields over which European armies have fled; and, in a former age of short-range fire arms, Napoleon followed and dispersed defeated armies, and Bluecher followed Napoleon himself, when his army melted away at Waterloo. The nearest approach to such pursuit was that, I believe, of Early by Sheridan's mounted infantry and cavalry, which drove him without an army out of the Shenandoah Valley.

Much complaint has been made by McClellan and his friends about the retention of McDowell's troops when the former, against the judgment of the Executive, attempted to take Richmond by surprise. Published documents prove that he disobeyed the express command of the President, founded on the opinions of the officers commanding his corps d'armee, and on that of those left to be responsible for the safety of the Capital. The President did not then detach McDowell from his command, but required him to be moved direct towards Richmond, being kept in position, on any movement threatening the Capital, to defend it. McClellan protested loudly, asserted that McDowell coming upon his right would be useless to him,—while, if sent by water to his left, *i.e.* between him and the deep sea, he would be of the greatest value—that it was impossible for Lee to detach troops to threaten Washington while he was on the Peninsula. While he thus protested and showed that he was not competent to alter his plans to suit his orders, the country was shocked by telegrams announcing that detachments of Lee's army had attacked the Shenandoah troops under Banks, and, driving them in confusion across the Potomac, spread terror in Maryland, and doubt in Washington. Then, and not till then, did the President order McDowell to march to the Shenandoah and striking hands with Fremont west of Jackson, intercept him if possible and destroy his power for mischief. The movement failed of success, and Jackson, after doing infinite damage, escaped to do still more injury by joining Lee at Richmond, and, fresh from this double march through a country held by McClellan to be impracticable, striking, and doubling up his right flank and driving him to the James River. This movement was designated not a defeat, but a change of base. A euphonious amendment of title.

The Battle of Malvern Hills, a well fought defensive battle, showed that the troops kept up a better heart than their commander shows in his hysterical despatches, railing against those whose advice he had rejected, whose orders for the safety of the Capital he had disobeyed, and yet, who were the creators of his rank, command, and power for good or evil.

The argument of the withdrawal from the Peninsula has been repeatedly published. Both sides have debated it ad-nauseam. I, after reading the despatches of dreadful discouragement first received from Harrison's Landing, made up my mind that it would be necessary. Mr. Lincoln found out that this was the opinion at Washington and expressed great regret that such was the opinion. He waited, sent Halleck to McClellan who was demanding 100,000 reinforcements and great supplies and promising nothing definite, only a hope that he could do something from the new refuge under the naval guns which he denominated the "new base", as though it had been from the beginning his objective point. It is not worth while to renew this exhausted discus-

sion. The campaigns of the greatest soldier of the war with carte-blanche from the Executive, occupied from the 4th of May to the middle of June in a bloody march to Richmond. After inflicting great damage upon his adversary and suffering a loss of 60,000 to himself, he reached the vicinity of Harrison's Landing in the middle of June, and, crossing the James, on April — '65,¹⁵ after 10 months from McClellan's refuge of a defeated army, Grant captured Richmond. It seems clear that McClellan, with a defeated army, could not have done better.

In his account of the council of Jany. 1862, he distinctly states that he declined, at the call of the President, to declare his plans then. His posthumous work of his "Own Story" contains his project under date Feby. 3d 1862, in reply to a letter of the President of same date, and in his account of the council held on Jany. 12th, he says that he had some weeks before, of his own volition, to comfort the Secretary of the Treasury troubled with financial operations by the uncertainty as to military operations, communicated to him his plans with which he was highly delighted.¹⁶ From another page,¹⁷ it appears that this was early in December, 1861, when his plans were sufficiently matured to make this possible. This, evidently from his letter of Feby. 3d, was the movement to Urbana, which, in execution, became the movement to Fortress Monroe.

It is not worth while to discuss the question whether he formulated, or had ever made known, plans for the campaigns of other armies. The Peninsula Campaign occupied so much of his military career, with its eventuality,—the operations arising in Lee's escape from the Army of McClellan, to the defeat at Antietam, that he had no opportunity to carry on other military operations. It may be proper here to say that so far as relates to the suspicion of the General that McDowell originated the council of January, it is improbable that he had any connection with the suggestion; and that of the secret examination into the condition of the Army which McClellan says had been entrusted to McDowell and Franklin by the President at that time, I never heard till I read with surprise his "Own Story". He speaks certainly of the part in it of McDowell and Franklin and thinks that Meigs was one of those thus entrusted. If so, I never knew it. I think it a delusion of a brain under typhoid fever, remembered in after years.

General McClellan's "Own Story", a posthumous publication but mostly from his own pen, reveals to the world his inner feelings and thoughts. It adds nothing to his glory. It shows that his mind made himself too much the centre of his plans and thoughts. It has been wittily described as a case of "posthumous *felo de se*".

Discontent with the President, with the Secretary of War, with Mr. Chase, suspicion of them, ingratitude to General Scott, suspicion of General McDowell, always a thoroughly patriotic officer, loyal and true,—appear throughout its pages. It is a pity for his fame that his weaknesses have thus by his friends been published to an unsympathising world.

General Pope had been active in the affairs of Island No. 10, in

¹⁵ Apr. 3. The meaning is that Richmond was occupied on that day, ten months after the crossing of the James.

¹⁶ *McClellan's Own Story*, pp. 229-236.

¹⁷ P. 203.

which Mr. Lincoln had taken great interest, requiring frequent telegraphic reports of progress in the casting and boring of the 13 inch sea coast mortars, the casting of their shells, the building of the huge solid timber rafts or floats, to carry them to their destination and to bear the shock of the discharge of their mortars. By the way, he afterwards said he had telegraphed for weeks several times a day and when all was over, he had never been able to learn that the bombardment had killed one hostile soldier.

After the evacuation of Corinth, Pope was active in pursuit. His reports as the press printed them, described great devastation and loss inflicted on the enemy as gathered from the waste and destruction seen on the routes by which they retired. The thousands of prisoners claimed in the printed accounts never reported at Halleck's headquarters, and later, Pope denied the authority of the despatches.¹⁸ But, he was then prominent, and was called to Washington and commissioned to command the scattered bodies of troops assembled for defense of Northern Virginia, and the Capital behind the Potomac; and to co-operate with the Army before Richmond. He was unable to prevent the march North of Lee, after McClellan was shut up at Harrison's Landing on the James, and, while McClellan was protesting that Lee could not move to threaten Washington so long as he was near Richmond, Pope was driven back, and it became necessary to hasten the slow transfer of the Army of the Potomac to save the Capital and Pope's army threatened, and defeated with great loss; while the daring enemy crossed the Potomac and invaded Pennsylvania.

I know nothing of the conception of Halleck's Corinth Campaign. I think the collection of a strong force at this point attracted Halleck's troops to the attempt to disperse them. An enemy has much to do with the determination of military movements. I once heard Halleck say to the President, "Mr. President you will remember that you directed me to take Corinth; early, if practicable, but in any case not to fail to take Corinth, and I did take it, Mr. President."

I do not think that Mr. Lincoln interfered in any important degree with General Halleck. They were in momentary telegraphic communication, and no doubt conferred frequently, even constantly.

When the Army of the Potomac carried on its rolls 200,000 men they cost the people, whether idle or employed, \$200,000,000 a year. This was not the only army. This was the ordinary rate of expenditure or cost per man of the American Army. And this without the enormous cost of steam transports waiting on them. The annual revenue and expenditure of the United States for all purposes in the year 1860, did not exceed \$60,000,000. The Executive looked of course with apprehension at such expenditures with no positive results which could be used to encourage the people to provide the money,—unorganized as was business, manufactures, and finances, for such burdens, with a cost of \$600,000 a day he was anxious that McClellan's army should show progress. This consideration did not seem to affect McClellan.

I doubt that in any other state or country could the Chief of the State and his Ministers of War have submitted to what Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Stanton bore. Stanton hoped great things from McClellan and received him cordially. The "Own Story" accuses him of treachery, it makes

¹⁸ See Force, *From Fort Henry to Corinth*, pp. 190-191.

the same vile accusation against General Scott, and it attempts to argue that the Administration did not wish the Army of the Potomac to succeed. Its pages, however, bear witness to the gradual and slow destruction of the hope and confidence at first given.

Many military names from this War will live in History but Lincoln's and Stanton's will outlast all but Grant's. These three are the great men of the War. I knew them all during its course. They differed in talents and in temperament, and in manner. Lincoln was easily first; Grant and Stanton occupied the second place. I will not attempt to say which should be the first of those two. But, all won my regard and such reverence as I have felt called on to give to no other men in the course of a long life in which I have shaken hands with every President since Adams,¹⁹ that is, with 16 of the 21 men who have held that high office.

Between Lincoln, Stanton and Grant, I believe there was never a dispute.

II. FROM GENERAL MEIGS'S LARGE DIARY, MARCH 29—APRIL 8, 1861.

[*March*] 29. To Great Falls. When we came home I found a request from the Secretary of State to come to see him. I went with him to the President who wished to see me. He said that they were in a difficulty and he wished to have the President talk with some man who would speak of what he knew—not of politics in military affairs and one who could get on a horse in the field too. He said they had had Gen. Scott and Gen. Totten but no one would think of putting either of these old men on horseback.

The President talked freely with me. I told him that men enough could be found to volunteer to endeavor to relieve Fort Sumter, but that persons of higher position and rank than myself thought it not to be attempted, that this was not the place to make the war, etc. He asked me whether Fort Pickens could be held.²⁰ I told him certainly, if the Navy had done its duty and not lost it already. The President asked whether I could not go down there again and take a general command of these three great fortresses²¹ and keep them safe. I told him I was only a captain and could not command majors who were there. He must take an officer of higher rank. Mr. Seward broke out with "I can understand too how that is, Captain Meigs, you have got to be promoted". I said, "That cannot be done; I am a captain and there is no vacancy". But Mr. Seward told the President that if he wished to have this thing done the proper way was to put it into my charge and it would be done, that I would give him an estimate of the means by 4 P. M. of the next day. He complimented me much. Said that when Pitt wished to take Quebec he did not send for any old general but he sent for a young man whom he had noticed in the society of London, named Wolfe, and told him that he had selected him to take Quebec, to ask for the necessary means and do it and it was done. Would the President do this now?

¹⁹ Meaning, John Quincy Adams.

²⁰ Captain Meigs, sent down from Washington in the preceding winter to strengthen the defences of Fort Jefferson, at the Dry Tortugas, was familiar with the circumstances of Fort Pickens.

²¹ Fort Taylor, at Key West, Fort Jefferson, at the Dry Tortugas, and Fort Pickens.

He replied that he would consider on it and would let me know in a day or two.

I walked home with Mr. Seward, who said he was much gratified at the result of this interview. That they²² had been in a strait. Gen. Scott objected to relieving Fort Sumter or Pickens, thought it best to give them up and thus put a stop to all cry of coercion. For his own part, his policy had been all along to give up Sumter as too near Washington and leaving a temptation to Davis to relieve it by an [attack] upon Washington. That he wished to hold Pickens, making the fight there and in Texas, and thus make the burden of the war, which all men of sense saw must come, fall upon those who by rebellion provoked it. That I must wait for a day or two and I should hear again from him.

30. Drew my pay for the month, \$168.20. Club at our house, quite a large meeting and a pleasant one.

31. As I was about to start for church this morning Col. Keyes,²³ Gen. Scott's military secretary, called and said that Mr. Seward had sent for me. We went to his house and he requested us to put down upon paper an estimate and project for relieving and holding Fort Pickens in consultation with Gen. Scott and to bring it to the President before 4 P. M.

I learned from the President himself the other day that he had verbally directed Gen. Scott to hold all these forts and make arrangements to reinforce them on the 5th of March. That about the 10th, finding nothing done, he had thought it best to put himself on record and had repeated the order in writing.²⁴ That he learned that the *Brooklyn* had gone to Key West and as she had the troops for Pickens on board he supposed that his orders had fizzled out.²⁵

That Gen. Scott had told him he did not think that Pickens ought to be held and this had given him a cold shock. He had not slept the night before he saw me, that is Thursday night. Felt much relieved at my assurance that the place could be held against all opposition by proper arrangements. Keyes and myself went to the engineer office, wrote out, after looking over the plan for Pickens, our views; compared notes, agreed, and were at the President's at 2½ P. M. Told him that we found we had not time to see Gen. Scott and be back with the result before 4 and had called to report. He with some effort [?] directed us to read our papers and then ordered us to see Gen. Scott, tell him instructions of the President and that he wished this thing done and not to let it fail unless he can show why the refusing him something he asked is necessary. "I depend upon you gentlemen to push this thing through."

We went to the house of Gen. Scott, showed him our papers which he approved saying there was nothing in them not necessary and little to be added as necessary. Mr. Seward came in and the matter was talked over and resolved upon.

April 1. At Gen. Scott's office laying out plans. To the President's.

²² Meaning, the Cabinet, at the meeting held that day; it is fully reported in Nicolay and Hay, *Lincoln*, III. 429-433.

²³ Lieut.-Col. Erasmus D. Keyes. See his *Fifty Years' Observation*, p. 380.

²⁴ Scott to Vogdes, Mar. 12. *Official Records, Navies*, IV. 90.

²⁵ Before sailing to Key West the *Brooklyn* had transferred her troops to the *Sabine*, but this was not known in Washington.

Got Lt. D. D. Porter ordered to go to N. Y.,²⁶ take any vessel ready and suitable, and proceed to sea and not draw rein until he was inside the Pensacola harbor, to capture [watch?] the place[?] strictly and to prevent any boat crossing the harbor with troops to attack Pensacola. I sent a despatch to commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard to get the *Powhatan* ready for sea with least possible delay. This was signed by the President.²⁷

Hard at work all day making orders for the signature of the President and for myself. We had much discussion as to who was to command this expedition. Secretary of State wished me to be promoted and take command, and when Gen. Scott showed him that this could not be done as the law would not allow it, he asked me to go. I told him I was ready for any duty in any place in any capacity at any pay, so long as it was in my country's service.

Gen. Scott said it was cruel to ask me to go away from these great works²⁸ and that in a rank so low as that which my captain's commission must give me. Seward said any arrangement which I could make for carrying on the works in my absence would be carried out, to this he pledged himself; and I got [my] pay anyhow; that fame would come from Pickens as well as from the Capitol; the Capitol might stop. There was no use in a capitol unless we had a country.

April 2. Having completed our plans Col. Brown²⁹ and Col. Keyes set out for New York to-day.³⁰ I follow. Have to transact other necessary business to-morrow.

3. Receive \$10,000 secret service money for hastening and helping the expedition.³¹ This is paid to me. I do not account for it. I gave to my wife of the money I have some \$300 and set out at 3:20 P. M. Took Thomas³² with me to N. Y.

4. Reached New York at 4 A. M. to-day. Set every thing going.

5. At work. Evening, telegram from Secretary of Navy to detain the *Powhatan*.³³ Porter in despair. Says he will do nothing more for this government. He will go to California and spend his time in surveying. He was under orders for California on the Coast survey, to sail on the 11th when I got him put upon this duty.³⁴

²⁶ Porter says that Meigs had already talked to him of his plan. *Incidents and Anecdotes*, pp. 13-14.

²⁷ Text in *Official Records, Navies*, IV. 109, and in G. V. Fox, *Confidential Correspondence*, I. 15.

²⁸ The Potomac aqueduct, the extension of the Capitol, and the constructing of its dome.

²⁹ Brevet-colonel Harvey Brown, U.S.A., who was to command the expedition.

³⁰ Keyes, p. 388, says that Meigs and Porter went by night train of Apr. 3, and that he went with them to Philadelphia and thence to New York the next morning. It is likely that Meigs wrote up his diary a few days later, at sea.

³¹ There being no military or naval secret-service funds, Seward went to his department, procured \$10,000 in coin from its secret-service fund, took it to his house, and there turned it over to Captain Meigs, who later returned \$6000 of it. Crawford, *Genesis of the Civil War*, pp. 411-412.

³² Thomas Allen, says a later annotation; a servant, presumably.

³³ Text in Soley's *Admiral Porter*, p. 110.

³⁴ Welles describes Lieutenant Porter at this time as being under Southern influence and anxious to go to California to avoid being put into action against the South. *Diary*, I. 19-20.

6. Everywhere. Had to go to the Navy Yard to endeavor to save the *Powhatan*. This did twice, and I succeeded in taking her though written orders from Secretary of Navy to send her to help reinforce Sumter on the 11th were in the yard.³⁵ I took the ground that Capt. Mercer had been relieved by orders signed by President,³⁶ that she was promised to our expedition, was a necessary and most important part of it, and that no man, secretary or other, had a right to take her, and that the secretary could not do it as I was by the President made responsible and told not to let even the Secretary of the Navy know that this expedition was going on. They gave her up to us and Porter sailed about noon. He was seen going down the harbor at 3 P. M.

7. We got to sea at 3 A. M. with order to set out [?] and pass the Light Ship about 7 A. M.

We are in the Collins steamship *Atlantic*, the first made Collins steamship and a noble vessel. We have on board 399 persons connected with our expedition, among them the engineer company of sappers and miners, a company of light artillery, with 73 sailors, 5 companies of troops altogether. I have in my pocket the commission of the marshal to be appointed at Key West. I have got the appointments of best men [for] district attorney and navy agent made. The district attorney will sail in the *Illinois*, which follows us tomorrow. A good set of officers and a good set of men. Our ship of 2846 tons is loaded with stores and people and sailors.

8. . . . Well, Keyes and I have done our duty and have set a ball in motion. Porter, the officer whom the whole Navy has by acclaim selected from the profession, is on his way into the harbor of Pensacola and into it he will go, God permitting, for man will not be able to prevent him.

III. FROM GENERAL MEIGS'S SMALL DIARY, JANUARY 10-13, 1862.

Friday, January 10, 1862:

Moving office of Q M Dept into Winders Building.

To Navy Dept to see the mode of making new gunboats.

President came to talk to me much depressed at inactivity of the army. McClellans sickness.³⁷

Sunday, January 12, 1862:

McDowell and Franklin called to discuss matters and invite me to a meeting with the President at 1 pm.

Met Presdt, Seward, Chase, Blair of Cabinet and these officers. McClellan had grown better and would meet us tomorrow.

³⁵ Welles to Capt. Samuel Mercer, commanding the *Powhatan*, Apr. 5. *Official Records, Navies*, IV. 235.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, IV. 109.

³⁷ Added note dated May 22, 1888: "I advised him that typhoid fever meant 6 weeks disability. He should see the officer next in rank, consult and determine who should command if the enemy, believed by McL. to be in great force should attack while he was ill or if any move become necessary. He sent for the Council 13th [meaning 12th]: Seward, Chase, Blair, Meigs, Franklin, and on 13th McClellan, Presidt Lincoln. See McL. Own Story Posthumous publication."

Monday, January 13, 1862:

At Prsdts.

Secy Chase, Seward, Blair. Gen. McClellan, McDowell and Franklin. Much discussion not much accomplished. McClellan declined giving his detailed plans. Indicated some thing of them generally.³⁸

³⁸ Added note, May 22, 1888: "See Gen. McLellans acct of this council in McL. Own Story, a Posthumous publication. He suspects all of intrigue against him. Thinks McDowell originated the whole." [*Remainder illegible.*]